DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 358 137 TM 019 923

AUTHOR Blank, M. A.; Kershaw, C.
TITLE Perceptions of Educators about Classroom Management Demands When Using Interactive Strategies.
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Atlanta, GA, April 12-16, 1993).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; Attitude Measures; *Classroom Techniques; Educational Environment; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Teachers; Nontraditional Education; *Principals; Questionnaires; Socialization; Staff Development; *Supervisors; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Characteristics; Teacher Role; Teaching Methods; Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Interactive Teaching; Knox County Schools TN; Translating Research Into Practice TN

ABSTRACT

The perceptions of elementary school teachers, principals, and supervisors about classroom management strategies required of teachers when using alternative task structures and interactive instructional strategies were studied. A questionnaire developed by the researchers was administered to 34 kindergarten through grade 5 teachers, 7 principals, and 3 supervisors involved in a staff development program in the Knox County (Tennessee) School System, Translating Research Into Practice (TRIP). Educators were readily able to identify classroom management skills necessary to promote learning in alternative task structures. The identified skills are linked to the instructional functions of planning, providing structure, facilitating group function, attending to physical requirements, actively monitoring and managing student behavior, and establishing a classroom climate that will support active social learning. Identified teacher characteristics are more in terms of attitude. Educators feel teachers need to be flexible, tolerant, facilitating, and able to help students develop responsibility and self-discipline. Giving up control is a recurrent theme. The use of alternative structures can give students more choice and control in learning and provide greater opportunities to work closely with peers, but they require more of both teachers and students. An appendix describes the survey questionnaire. (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

MARY ANN BLANK

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED358137

PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATORS ABOUT CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT DEMANDS WHEN USING INTERACTIVE STRATEGIES

M. A. Blank, Ed.D., and C. Kershaw, Ed.D.

TM019923

Perceptions Of Educators About Classroom Management Demands When Using Interactive Strategies

M.A. Blank, Ed.D, and C. Kershaw, Ed.D.

117 Claxton Educ. Building
The University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996-3400

April, 1993

Introduction

Educators are being influenced by the basic principles of constructivist learning theory proposed by cognitive psychologists. Constructivism is a learning theory that "emphasizes the importance of the learner's active construction of knowledge and the interplay between new knowledge and the learner's prior knowledge" (ASCD, p. 4). The goal is to allow students to explore and discover their own learning thus leading to deeper levels of understanding. According to Brophy (1992), "Students do not passively receive or copy input from teachers, but instead actively mediate it by trying to make sense of it and to relate it to what they already know (or think they know) about the topic. Thus students develop new knowledge through a process of active construction" (p. 5). Instruction consistent with constructivist principles places less emphasis on didactic forms of instruction and more emphasis on guiding students in developing insights and assimilating knowledge (Wittmer & Myrick, 1989). The literature suggests that as teachers become aware of the constructivist conceptions of learning, their beliefs change about the ways students learn best and they begin to employ instructional strategies consistent with their beliefs.

According to Posner (1993), teachers' beliefs affect their actions and the ways common teaching practices are viewed (p. 45-46). Teachers who hold constructivist beliefs about learning act in ways consistent with their beliefs. They create learning environments that are more interactive. They use alternative task structures and complex instructional approaches to support the more cognitively active and social learning processes. The alternative task structures supplement or replace the more "mainstream" direct instruction, whole group model. These alternative task structures are required for complex instruction. According to E. Cohen (1991), "Complex instruction refers to instruction in which different groups carry out different activities at a pace not directly regulated by the teacher, and is characterized by rotating groups, uncertainty, and development of higher order thinking skills" (p. i). The many forms of cooperative learning, group problem solving, and student projects could be considered complex instruction as they "are complex from the teacher's point of view and involve elements of uncertainty from the student's point of view" (p.3). Alternative task structures and complex instruction have distinctive features. For much of the instructional time students are working together on higher order instructional tasks and are conversing or interacting in pairs, triads or small groups.

Gaea Leinhardt (1992) asserts that interactive instructional approaches bring about "powerful changes in the dynamics of the classroom" (p. 24). Elizabeth Cohen (1991) and others agree. Classroom environments and the roles of those within them change to be more congruent with these new instructional dynamics. Interactive classrooms require changes in the roles of both students and teachers. For students, the role changes from a passive recipient to an active participant. Students are responsible for managing their own learning and work behaviors as they engage in learning activities. They also share and work collaboratively with other students toward accomplishing goals. Necessitated by the shift in the role of the student, there is a corresponding shift in the role of the teacher. For teachers, the role is to facilitate rather than to directly control all aspects of the learning process; to serve as resource persons; to coach, give feedback, and clarify instructional tasks; to scaffold the information with the student; and to provide needed assistance until students can progress on their own (Brophy, 1992). According to Prawat (1992), one of the teacher's primary responsibilities is to create the learning community, to be seen as a "community-builder" (p. 12). Gaea Leinhardt (1992) says that the teacher's role becomes that of "a highly

knowledgeable member of the community--a guide . . ." (p. 25).

The complexity and lack of familiarity with the alternative structures in addition to the increased intellectual demand and uncertainty inherent in interactive strategies generate complex classroom management demands (for both teachers and students). The current literature base does not provide adequate guidance for teachers who are attempting to create and maintain classroom environments that support complex instruction and the more active, social learning. According to many respected researchers, the available research base is solid in terms of how effective teachers establish and manage a positive, orderly environment with clear rules, procedures, and consequences. However, there is limited research that looks beyond how teachers maintain order and control student behaviors to how teachers create learning environments consistent with the demands of interactive, complex instruction.

According to Evertson and Harris (1992), "Most classroom management studies have looked at classrooms with routinized, predictable academic tasks and activities. Little research has examined different instructional contexts . . ." (p. 77). They advocate a more encompassing view of classroom management. Specifically, they state that "today's research moves away from a focus on controlling students' behavior and looks instead at teacher actions to create, implement, and maintain a classroom environment that supports learning" (p. 74). They are aware that teachers must recognize both the "academic and social dimensions of classroom tasks" (p. 75). They also must be cognizant of the procedural complexity of classroom tasks and their "consequences for classroom management" (Evertson & Harris, 1992, p. 75). They go on to say that future research should describe "how to create supportive environments in schools that face complex and changing needs" (p. 74).

According to Walter Doyle (1986), the pervasive concerns for teachers in planning and organizing instruction are about order and control. Teachers are aware that the way order is established and maintained differs according to activity structure. The level of complexity increases as they move from whole-class lessons to multiple-group arrangements). Different interactional demands emerge depending on the activity structure. While it is clear that there is a relationship between classroom structure and the behavior of the participants, there is little research to inform teachers about the best ways to manage the more complex classroom/activity structures.

In addition, Doyle (1986) states "Unfortunately, there is little information available concerning the problems classroom teachers have in managing cooperative team learning procedures" (p. 405). Consistent with the concept of cooperation is the fact that classroom activities are jointly constructed by the participants. It appears that "order in the classroom depends on students' willingness to follow along with unfolding events" (Doyle, p. 396). In interactive classrooms, the management of the classroom environment is a shared, jointly constructed endeavor. Teachers and students are negotiating new territory with unclear, unpredictable paths. Teachers remain concerned about how to establish and maintain a productive environment, but it is with a new emphasis on student learning and responsibility.

Description of the Study

The major purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of elementary teachers, principals, and supervisors about classroom management strategies required of teachers when using alternative task structures and interactive instructional strategies.

The four objectives of the study were to:

- determine which classroom management skills educators feel are most important in promoting

learning in alternative task structures;

- identify the adjustments in existing classroom management strategies that are required when implementing alternative task structures;
- identify the ways educators' beliefs about student behavior and/or the ways students learn best are affected by the use of alternative task structures and interactive instructional strategies;
- determine obstacles educators perceive when implementing alternative task structures or interactive instructional strategies.

Data Sources and Methodology

A questionnaire developed by the researchers was the source of data for this study. (See Appendix for a sample questionnaire.) The format was open-ended and included some demographic information. Teachers were asked to identify their grade levels and the frequency of their use of alternative task structures and interactive strategies. An open-ended format was chosen to encourage in-depth responses from the participants. The attempt was to ascertain the emic or insiders' views that would reflect the respondents' reality. The instrument was field-tested with several experienced, elementary teachers and their feedback was incorporated into the final form of the questionnaire.

Participants in the study were thirty-four elementary teachers, seven principals, and three supervisors of instruction involved in a year long staff development program sponsored by Knox County School System in Tennessee during the 1991-92 school year. The program is called TRIP, Translating Research Into Practice. One purpose of TRIP is to expose educators to current research-based instructional approaches that have proven effective in terms of student achievement and attitude toward learning. The eight sessions are focused on such topics as developing student motivation, managing student behavior, planning, cooperative learning approaches, group problem solving, and strategies to encourage higher level thinking. The text that serves as the basis for the program is Teaching From A Research Knowledge Base (Bellon, Bellon, & Blank, 1992). An additional purpose of TRIP is to provide opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues in implementing research-based instructional approaches in ways that are appropriate for the needs of their students. The sessions are structured to encourage discussion and sharing of practical knowledge about the topics. In examining the research and in attempting to transfer the research-based practices into their classrooms, these educators have to re-examined their own beliefs about learning and about classroom management practices.

The participants in this study are not considered to be representative of all elementary educators, but are considered to be especially appropriate for this study. These are experienced educators who are perceived to be teacher leaders in their buildings and are innovative and willing to try new instructional ideas.

The educators' responses were analyzed using qualitative analysis procedures. According to Schumacher and McMillan (1993), qualitative data analysis "is primarily an inductive process of organizing the data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among the categories" (p. 479). Inductive modes of analysis were used to allow categories, patterns, and relationships to emerge from the data (Sherman & Webb, 1988). Qualitative procedures were chosen because of the "fit" with the research questions. Qualitative analysis provided a systematic way of "making sense" of a single phenomenon of interest (Schumacher & McMillan, p. 482). The basic processes incorporated were identifying tentative categories through preliminary analysis to "get a sense of

the whole," categorizing and ordering of the data, and synthesizing the data into patterns or themes. Through preliminary analysis, relevant data segments were developed. Generally, the data segments corresponded to the questions on the research instrument. Data topics or categories emerged from the data segments. The intent of the analysis was to identify distinct categories and subcategories. As the analysis progressed, some reorganizing of categories occurred. The similarities and distinctions among the categories were examined to discover the major themes or patterns. These major patterns are then expressed as findings which represent a higher-level synthesis of the information. The narrative description accompanying the findings provides indepth information that illustrates the recurring themes.

As the analysis occurred, periodic deductive checks on the legitimacy of the patterns or findings provided a level of verification. In addition, the two researchers involved in the study categorized and analyzed the data independently. The findings were generated collaboratively. Data collection and analysis were not simultaneous events. Analysis occurred after the data were collected. Two respondent groups were established for the purpose of analysis. Teacher responses were analyzed separately from those of the administrators (i.e., principals or supervisors). The major findings are presented as well as the narrative information for each group.

Findings

The thirty-four teacher respondents were fairly evenly distributed across grades K through 5. By self-report, all but one teacher judged their use of alternative task structures to be very often (three to four times per week) or often (one to two times per week).

Finding 1. Certain classroom management skills are necessary in making alternative task structures effective. Educators perceive those skills to be the teacher's ability to plan, structure, and actively manage instruction as well as to be flexible.

Teachers

The primary skill identified is the ability to establish clear rules for behavior. Teachers feel that it is necessary to communicate behavioral expectations and instructional goals for their students. They feel that it is important to teach desired behaviors and appropriate social skills such as talking in turn and using quiet voices. Closely related to clear rules is the need to establish well understood procedures. Teachers feel that it is critical to devise specific guidelines, limits, or structure. It is also important that teachers provide explicit directions so that all students understand the task, the rules, and their role in learning activities. It is suggested that the students could develop this understanding by being involved in establishing the limits and through the use of role play. Several teachers feel that they must take the responsibility for increasing the level of student motivation and interest in the activity .

Teachers' ability to organize and plan for alternative task structures is also a necessary skill. When planning learning activities, teachers need to determine long and short range goals. They also need to determine ways to integrate subject matter, the congruence of task demands and student skill levels, and conditions that will allow each student to be successful. Scheduling time for the activity and managing the time are additional considerations. Having materials ready and accessible as well as structuring the room also require teacher planning. Assigning students to groups and establishing roles ensuring that each student is responsible for some aspect of the learning are also important planning decisions.

Teachers must be active in managing student behavior. Monitoring students as they work, evaluating progress, making adjustments, and giving feedback are actions thought to facilitate effective group work. In addition, transitions between learning activities need to be carefully managed. It is also important to have a classroom management system in place based on expectations, consistent follow-through and fair consequences. Teachers note that in order to sustain positive results, reinforcement should be provided. In addition, verbal and nonverbal signals can be used to facilitate the learning process.

An important factor in having students work together in alternative structures is teacher attitude. One teacher said, "Teacher attitude, more than management skill, seems to be the key." Teachers who are flexible, who can tolerate noise and movement, who accept student ideas, and who have a sense of humor are perceived to be more successful in using alternative structures. It is suggested that "teachers need to learn to be resource persons rather than the main figures." The ability to facilitate the instructional process is seen as an asset.

Principals and Supervisors

Principals and supervisors identify management skills consistent with those identified by teachers. Teachers' ability to plan and organize for alternative structures is identified as critical to the effectiveness of the instruction. Planning and organizational requirements include evaluating students in terms of readiness and skill levels, assigning them to appropriate groups, arranging the physical environment, and preparing instructional materials. When the learning activities are well planned and organized, it is perceived that students are able to benefit cognitively and affectively. When instructing, teachers are responsible for establishing expectations and limits as well as for providing clear directions. Additional management skills identified as important in making alternative task structures effective are active monitoring of students' learning and work behavior, managing transitions, adjusting requirements to meet student needs, and involving students when evaluating the learning activity and when synthesizing the information learned.

Several principals and supervisors noted that teachers must be able to create a "different" classroom learning climate--a culture of excellence. To establish this type of climate or culture, it is suggested that the management system must promote self-direction and the development of student responsibility. The system must accommodate the increased level of "learning noise" and movement. Students should have an active role and increased responsibility in learning activities. Teachers need to come to see their role as one of a facilitator.

Finding 2. Developing tolerance for increased student activity and flexibility are perceived to be the major adjustments teachers must make when implementing alternative structures.

Teachers

Thirty-one of the thirty-four teachers responding feel that adjustments must be made in classroom management strategies in order to make alternative instructional structures effective. The main adjustment is in the area of tolerance. Teachers say that they need to develop tolerance for "busy" noise, for more peer interaction, and for more student movement. Adjustments are also needed when forming groups and getting them to function productively. This may require changing group membership (due to incompatibility or academic needs), designating group leaders, or modifying seating arrangements. The format of alternative structures also requires teachers to establish new routines, new parameters for behavior, and signals to reinforce expectations (for example, to end the discussion or to soften voices). Time is required for teachers to instruct the students on the new routines and to teach responsibility and social skills. Because students may work in different

areas within or outside the room, teachers need to accommodate to the unfamiliar situation.

During instruction, teachers feel that increased monitoring is required in order to maintain the smooth functioning of the groups. They feel they need to closely monitor the group to determine how students are progressing and if appropriate learning behaviors are being exhibited.

Another main area of adjustment is in the teachers' ability to be flexible. Teachers feel that they have to adjust their beliefs and attitudes about student behavior and the way students learn best. Teachers acknowledge that using alternative structures is a change from a more direct teaching style. When using alternative structures, teachers have to be willing to accept students' ideas and suggested strategies. Teachers also feel that giving up control and authority to some extent is required in order to realize the benefits of having students work in alternative structures. Flexibility is also necessary in meeting immediate demands of the instructional situation--those that cannot be readily anticipated. Interactive (during instruction) adjustments need to be made when students are confused and when more time is needed. Precise scheduling is difficult since time allocation may be flexed. Teachers feel that they must be responsive to student abilities, interests, and individual needs.

The teachers also note that students require adjustment in moving to unfamiliar task structures. It is suggested that they need to move into new instructional situations gradually. Students need reinforcement and assurance that they are capable of finding the answers and that they can accomplish the task successfully without relying on the teacher.

Three teachers specifically stated that they do not feel that using alternative task structures requires any adjustments in classroom management strategies.

Principals and Supervisors

Most respondents feel that adjustments in classroom management strategies are necessary in using alternative task structures. The primary adjustment identified by principals and supervisors is the shift in teachers' thinking. Developing a tolerance for the increased noise and movement is noted as well as developing tolerance for ambiguity and lack of formal structure. Closely related is the suggestion that teachers must give up control. Additional adjustments are needed in the ways instruction is organized and implemented. The instruction and expectations need to be more detailed and explicit. The place and evaluation of instruction need to be modified and adjusted to meet student needs. There are also differences in the ways groups are formed and the physical arrangements of classrooms. Classroom rules may need to be modified to be consistent with the development of student self-discipline and responsibility.

Two principals and supervisors do not feel that adjustments in classroom management strategies are needed. It is suggested that teachers still have to be consistent by telling the students what is expected and by following through. In many ways, "the existing parameters fit."

Finding 3. Educators report that confidence in students' academic gains and social benefits develops as a result of teachers having students work together in alternative task structures.

Teachers

Twenty-six teachers specifically note that their beliefs about how students should behave and how they learn best have changed as a result of using alternative task structures. A number of teachers express the belief that students do learn from peers. One teacher's comment is that "I now know

that students can learn from one another." Some additional teachers said that the students enjoy working with other students more than working alone. Other teachers say that students can take responsibility for organizing and managing themselves when they know what is expected. One teacher notes that "students learn to work in a shared manner with different personalities." Another comment that "top students learn to listen to others instead of always being in control." One teacher suggests that "students learn best when they are allowed to make decisions." Teachers also feel that variety in instructional approaches is partly the reason why alternative structures are successful with the students.

The motivational aspect of using alternative task structures is noted. Students are thought to work harder, remain more interested and involved, make more academic progress, use the time more effectively, behave better, and cooperate better with one another. Teachers say that students are more effective than teachers in explaining things to other students. One comment is that "there is less pressure on the students when they don't understand--it is easier to ask for help from their peers."

Several teachers feel that students have been able to acquire skills when working in alternative structures that they were not able to master in more traditional structures. It is suggested that students are able to exhibit strengths that are not evident when students work in other structures. It is also noted that students also show improved communication skills and better vocabulary.

A number of teachers express that their beliefs about the benefits of having students work in alternative structures are derived from seeing increased self-esteem and expectancy for success in their students. Comments include the following: "Students feel better about themselves because they get more actively involved in the learning and they are able to help others," "fewer students fail at their tasks," and "low students feel self-worth."

One teacher has gained so much confidence in using alternative structures that she used cooperative groups on a large scale. During a grade level event (States Fair) with 130 4th graders, cooperative groups were organized to accomplish their assigned tasks. The teacher was impressed with how well the students worked in their groups.

Two teachers respond that they have always believed that students learn best when they work together. One comment is that "I have always taught this way."

Principals and Supervisors

All but two of the principals and supervisors agree that their beliefs about conditions that facilitate student learning have been affected by seeing how well alternative structures work. Their comments echo statements made by the teachers. Several specifically say that they see increased motivation and learning. They mention student "buy in" and increased level of interest and engagement. One comment is that "students can help each other learn." It is suggested that alternative structures meet the needs of students who learn in different ways. Comments that reflect new insights on learning activities include: "I see that it is okay to have a bee hive of activity," and "Social skills are as important as academic skills."

One principal and one supervisor respond that they have not changed their thinking about the ways students learn best. They have always felt that students learn best "through concrete, sensory experiences" and "from interacting with each other."

Finding 4. Educators perceive that obstacles such as inefficient structuring and functioning of the groups (by students and teachers) and resistance to change

must be overcome in order for teachers to use interactive instructional approaches effectively.

Teachers

The major obstacle reported is structuring the groups and getting the students to work well together. Most of the teachers report that they experienced some difficulty related to the way the groups functioned. Teachers express some difficulty in gaining cooperation, getting everyone involved, maintaining appropriate behaviors, using the time well, and dealing with the few students who seem especially poor at functioning as group members (i.e., those who are reluctant, immature, dominating, or who have short attention spans). One teacher summed up her feelings as "students resist change as much as we do." It is suggested that students initially have some problems "handling the situation."

Teachers note additional difficulties in implementing interactive instructional strategies. Increased noise level is identified as an obstacle. Others comment on the problems encountered in planning such as adjusting to the time requirements and materials preparation. Teachers specifically identified finding time for the activity as an obstacle. Other teachers note that alternative structures are more complicated to manage. It is more difficult to explain the directions and it is easier to get "off base." A few teachers suggest that criticism from others is an obstacle. One teacher comments on the criticism she receives from other, "more structured" teachers.

One kindergarten teacher sees no obstacles in using alternative structures as she feels that with kindergarten and lower grade students these structures work well.

Principals and Supervisors

Many of the principals and supervisors perceive obstacles related to the teachers' level of comfort and understanding about alternative task structures. The majority of the comments address the teachers' inertia, or fear, lack of understanding about options. They feel that teachers need reassurance in using interactive approaches and that they often are "unsure of how much deviation from the norm is appropriate." One principal comments that teachers are concerned about seeming to be disorganized or overly lenient by allowing too much noise. Another notes that teachers need help in getting students ready to work with others in terms of self-monitoring and ability to be responsible.

Discussion

While it is important to acknowledge limitations in terms of data sources and number of participants, the data collected provide insights into the perceptions of educators about classroom management demands when teachers employ interactive instructional strategies. The major findings of the study address the research questions. The first research question is answered as educators are readily able to identify classroom management skills necessary to promote learning in alternative task structures. They identify specific skills and actions as well as teacher characteristics. The identified classroom management skills are linked to the instructional functions of planning, providing structure, facilitating group functioning, attending to physical requirements, active monitoring and managing of student behavior, and establishing a classroom climate that will support active, social learning. The identified teacher characteristics are more in terms of attitude. Educators feel teachers need to be flexible, tolerant, facilitating, and able to help students develop responsibility and self-discipline. "Giving up control" is a recurring theme in the educators' responses.

It could be concluded that educators in this study did not identify totally new or different management skills or teacher characteristics. The current research base would support the identified actions and attitudes as those of effective classroom managers regardless of specific task structure (Bellon, Bellon, & Blank, 1992). Some confirmation for this assertion is also evident in the educator responses to the second research question. While several educators feel that "the existing parameters fit," the majority of the participants feel that some adjustments in actions and attitude are necessary. Again, the adjustments identified do not suggest totally new actions and attitudes. They focus more on modifications in existing routines and instructional behaviors that promote effective, cooperative group functioning. The adjustments are required because of the requirements of the learning tasks, the interactions that take place, and the cooperation or collaborative skills that must be developed. It appears that there are increased demands in terms of interactive decisions as the learning activities are taking place.

One implication of these findings is that teachers should not discard what has worked in the past in order to implement new task structures. In fact, teachers should be encouraged to build on their tried and true classroom management techniques, while expanding their repertoire to meet the increased demands of interactive structures. The emphasis is on blending the old techniques with the new or applying the old in a new context. The same goal for student behavior--to preserve classroom order--exists in both the old and new contexts. What is perceived as order is, as Cohen says, relative to task structure. It appears that preserving classroom order is more a matter of degree and emphasis in regard to classroom management skills and attitudes and that they must be modified to meet the demands of the particular classroom structure. The emphasis moves from controlling student behavior to providing opportunities that allow students to develop self-control and responsibility for their learning behaviors. The focus is on facilitating rather than controlling (Wittmer & Myrick, 1989).

Another closely related implication is for teachers and those in supervisory positions. They should have an awareness and knowledge of the specific ways management skills are applied to be consistent with the requirements of the task structure. As Cohen (1992) advises, "The choice of management strategies should be based on the technical requirements of the task" (p. 2). The requirements differ when students work in whole group structures and when they are in some alternative task structure. Cohen warns that when students are involved in alternative structures involving complex instruction, direct supervision strategies will inhibit the learning process. Direct supervision "will prevent the students from taking responsibility for control of their own behavior and for that of other group members" (Cohen, 1992, p. 2).

Educator responses to the third research question suggest a recent advocacy for the use of alternative task structures and interactive instructional strategies. The majority of teachers and administrators expressed a change in their beliefs about student behavior and the ways students learn best. Educators were able to enumerate many cognitive and motivational benefits when students were allowed to work together in alternative task structures. Having seen the positive results, they are now willing to continue using interactive approaches.

It also appears that teachers' willingness to continue using cooperative learning or other interactive approaches is affected by the level of difficulty they experience when trying to implement them. In responding to the fourth research question, educators readily acknowledge the obstacles they face when using interactive strategies. Two-thirds of the teachers reported experiencing difficulties. In addition to the management and instructional considerations, educators suggested that the resistance to change on the part of teachers as well as the students is an important obstacle. To many of these educators, the comfort and security offered by the more traditional, less complex task structures and strategies is difficult to move beyond. In interactive classrooms, the unfamiliar demands, the uncertainty or ambiguity, and the increased responsibility for all participants requires

new interactions and behaviors.

Another obstacle noted by both teachers and administrators is the anxiety or insecurity they experience when they move "out of the norm." Some educators expressed their uneasiness with being perceived as lenient or disorganized. It is clear that some teachers do not want to draw negative criticism from their colleagues, principals, or supervisors. It appears that the perceptions of "giving up control" or of being different are not consistent with their views of the appropriate role for teachers. The implication is that teachers need help in developing a level of comfort with their role as facilitator. According to Cohen (1992), "Teachers need to understand about delegation of authority and how this does not mean giving up control. They must grasp the concept of how roles and norms operate to take care of many of the behaviors they have always directly supervised. Most important, they must understand how delegation of authority acts to maximize the amount of student interaction and thus student learning" (p. 17).

The beliefs expressed by the educators in this study as well as the obstacles they have encountered appear consistent with what other educators have experienced. Teachers report a high frequency of use of cooperative learning and other interactive approaches and are seeing them as productive in terms of student learning and attitudes. A review of the current research base provides strong support for increased cognitive gains as well as improved motivation and positive attitudes toward learning exhibited by students when allowed to work cooperatively to accomplish tasks (Bellon, Bellon, & Blank, 1992). In addition, by the shear numbers of articles addressing cooperative learning, it is clear that cooperative learning continues to be a high interest instructional topic. The acceptance of cooperative learning is also rapidly growing. Currently about ten per cent of teachers nationwide are using some form of cooperative learning (ASCD, 1992, p. 1), and it is expected that the percentage will increase. Throughout the literature, one recurring theme is that productive implementation of cooperative learning requires that teachers find ways to effectively manage the environment as students work in groups. It is suggested that the educational potential of higher achievement and increased prosocial behavior can only be realized when cooperative learning is implemented appropriately.

Another implication of these findings is that teachers need instruction about interactive instructional strategies, especially the classroom management skills necessary to promote maximum benefits. Teachers need more opportunities to discuss with colleagues, problem-solve, and develop new skills and knowledge. Collaborative planning and problem solving should be encouraged among all educators. In addition, there must be an overall climate within schools that is supportive of risk taking. The educational culture should be one that values a wide range of instructional strategies. As Goldenberg and Gallimore (1992) assert, "We must, instead, create contexts in teachers' work lives that assist and sustain meaningful changes. These contexts should consist, preeminently, of engaging teachers in rigorous examinations of teaching: the concrete challenges and problems they face, the range of possible solutions and, most important, close examination of whether, over time, there is progress in addressing these challenges" (p. 69).

One important contextual factor with this study is that these educators were involved in this year-long staff development program which promoted innovative instruction. It would be expected that these teachers would report using interactive strategies with a high degree of regularity. The intent of the staff development program is to develop a supportive cadre of teachers at each school site who have all examined the current research on teaching and learning and who are encouraged to implement research-based instructional strategies. The structure of the program forces the participants to examine their beliefs about teaching and learning in light of the research information and to engage in discussions about the research and its implications for their teaching. Sharing and problem-solving among school personnel and across schools is a formalized part of the structure. Peer observations and analysis of instruction are also important cornerstones to the process. This

structure is consistent with principles proposed by Joyce and Showers (1983), and others with expertise in professional development. This is supported by Goldenberg and Gallimore (1992) who contend that staff development "must be grounded in the mundane but very real details of teachers' daily work lives . . ." (p. 69). The discussions at TRIP sessions are similar to what Goldenberg and Gallimore refer to as "instructional conversations."

Another contextual factor in this study is that Tennessee teachers have experienced a "high stakes" evaluation process associated with the Career Ladder merit pay program. For the past several years teachers have received staff development and evaluations based on the Tennessee Instructional Model (TIM). Although the model has undergone some revision, it remains basically a direct instruction model, fundamentally the instructional model proposed by M. Hunter. While this study does not address the influence of TIM on the beliefs and behaviors of teachers, the mere existence of the model and its link to their evaluation would be expected to have some impact. Although not a dominant theme, it is evident that teachers resist change and do not want to be perceived as outside the mainstream.

The consistency of perceptions of teachers, principals, and supervisors in this study provides insights that may be helpful to others in adapting the organization and management of classrooms to enhance student learning. Making important instructional changes requires knowledge and effort. Making these transitions requires educators at all levels to have a strong belief system, a long-term view of and dedication to change, and an increased understanding about what should be happening in classrooms. Brophy (1992) emphasizes the changing implication of research, but also how the research was built on what was learned before. According to Brophy, "Clearly, the kind of teaching described here demands more from both teachers and students than traditional reading-recitation-seatwork teaching does. However, it also rewards their efforts with more satisfying and authentic accomplishments" (p. 8).

The use of alternative task structures can give students more choice and control in learning and provide greater opportunities to work closely with peers, but they require more of both teachers and students. Having students work in alternative task structures toward common learning goals has solid research support in terms of increased student achievement and improved attitudes toward learning (Slavin, 1986). In some classrooms, however, attempts are being made to implement new structures that are producing only mediocre or minimal gains. In many cases this can be attributed to an insufficient knowledge base upon which instructional decisions are made or to a lack of experience in dealing with change. In others there is a tendency to grasp the next "quick fix" without attending to important classroom management considerations. As teachers begin to shift from teacher-centered classrooms to student-centered ones, they need opportunities to develop an understanding of the requirements of the task structures, appropriate classroom management techniques, and comfort with their role as a facilitator to the learning process.

Appendix

The questionnaire was administered by the researchers during the April, 1992 meeting of TRIP. Oral explanation of the questionnaire and opportunities for clarification were also provided by the researchers.

Each educator was asked to identify him/herself as a teacher, principal, or supervisor. Teachers were asked to indicate their level of use of alternative task structures or interactive instructional strategies (such as cooperative learning or group problem-solving). The options were: never, seldom (one time every 2 weeks), often (one to two times per week), or very often (three to four times per week). All educators were asked to respond to the following questions:

- What classroom management skills do you feel are most important in making alternative task structures, such as cooperative learning or group problem-solving, effective learning activities?
- Are adjustments in classroom management strategies required when implementing alternative task structures? If yes, what are they?
- Has the use of alternative task structures affected your beliefs about student behavior and/or the ways students learn best? If yes, in what ways?
- Did you encounter any obstacles in trying to implement alternative task structures or interactive instructional strategies? If so, what were they?

References

Brophy, J. (1992). Probing the subtleties of subject-matter teaching. Educational Leadership, 49(7), 4-8.

Bellon, J. J., Bellon, E.C., & Blank, M.A. (1992). Teaching from a research knowledge base: A development and renewal process. New York: Macmillan.

Blank, M. M. (1988). Mentoring and the process of becoming a teacher. Unpublished dissertation. Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee.

Cohen, E.G. (1991, April). Classroom Management and Complex Instruction. A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.

Cooperative Learning Shows Staying Power. (1992, March). ASCD Update, 34(3), 1-2. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Doyle, W. (1986). Classroom Organization and Management. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), Handbook of Research on Teaching (3rd., pp.392-431). New York: Macmillan.

Evertson, C. M., & Harris, A. H. (1992). What we know about managing classrooms. Educational Leadership, 49(7), 74-78.

Goldenberg, C. & Gallimore, R. (1992). Changing teaching takes more than a one-shop workshop. Educational Leadership, 49(3), 69-72.

Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1983). Power in staff development through research on training. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Leinhardt, G. (1992). What research on learning tells us about teaching. Educational Leadership, 49(7), 20-25.

Posner, G.J. (1993). Field experience: A guide to reflective teaching. White Plains, NY: Longman Publishing Group.

Prawat, R. S. (1992). From individual differences to learning communities--our changing focus. Educational Leadership, 49(7), 9-13.

Schumacher, S., & McMillan, J. H. (1993). Research in education: A conceptual understanding (3rd ed.). New York: Harper Collins College Publishers.

Sherman, R.R., & Webb, R.B. (1988). Qualitative research in education: A focus. In R.R. Sherman & R.B. Webb (Eds.), Qualitative research in education: Focus and methods (pp. 2-21). New York: The Falmer Press.

Slavin, R.E. (1986). Using student team learning. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University. Wanted: Deep Understanding. (1992, March). ASCD Update, 34 (3), 1, 4-5, 8. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Wittmer, J., & Myrick, R. D. (1989). The teacher as facilitator. Minneapolis, MN: Educational Media Corporation.